

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS

COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

FOREIGN RELATIONS

INDIAN AFFAIRS

RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

September 25, 2018

Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Google
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Sundar Pichai:

I write regarding the Google Play Store's compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). As one of one two major mobile operating systems, Google has a responsibility to ensure apps on the Android Platform follow U.S. law to protect children's privacy online. I urge you to direct an audit of all applications in the "Designed for Families" section of the Play Store to ensure compliance with COPPA, remove any app that violates the law, and improve app vetting in this section going forwards.

COPPA protects children from being improperly tracked including for advertising purposes. It explicitly prohibits children's apps from collecting personal details including names, email addresses, geolocation data and tracking identifiers like advertising identifiers. The "Designed for Families" section, as well as the age-appropriate rating, misleads parents to believe that Google ensures that these apps are compliant with COPPA.¹

According to a Proceeding on Privacy Enhancing Technologies Study, nearly half of the 6,000 free children's Android apps are potentially in violation of COPPA.² This report of thousands of apps are potentially illegally tracking children is worrisome.³ American families should have a reasonable expectation of privacy for their children when they use the Android platform and that apps available in the families section do not violate COPPA. Given the potential for COPPA violations, I respectfully ask Google to answer the following questions about its efforts at compliance:

¹ Valentino-DeVries, J., Singer, N., Krolick, A., Keller, M. H., "How Game Apps That Captivate Kids Have Been Collecting Their Data." *The New York Times*. 2018, September 12.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/09/12/technology/kids-apps-data-privacy-google-twitter.html>

² Irwin Reyes, Primal Wijesekera, Joel Reardon, Amit Elazari Bar On, Abbas Razaghpanah, Narseo Vallina-Rodriguez, and Serge Egelman (2018) "Won't Somebody Think of the Children?" Examining COPPA Compliance at Scale. *Proceedings on Privacy Enhancing Technologies*. 2018 (3), 63-83.

<https://petsymposium.org/2018/files/papers/issue3/popets-2018-0021.pdf>

³ Shaban, Hamza. "Thousands of apps in Google Play Store may be illegally tracking children, study finds." *The Washington Post*. 2018, April 18. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/04/16/thousands-of-android-apps-may-be-illegally-tracking-children-study-finds/>

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- What specific steps does Google currently take to ensure that apps in the “Directed for Families” section are abiding by your terms of service with regards to COPPA?
- How do you currently audit the “Designed for Families” section?
- In the last year, how many applications have you removed from the Google Play Store due to violations of COPPA? If so, please provide all details regarding app, date, and cause for action.
- Of those applications in the “Designed for Families” section, how many send personally identifiable information about children to third-party applications without verifiable parental consent?

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. Please provide a written response no later than Monday, October 22, 2018.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Udall". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "U".

Tom Udall
United States Senator